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THE OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MANUAL TRAINING TEACHER

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The manual training writer of today, being no longer taken up with apologies for his subject or explanations of it, may well consider the pioneer stage of his profession as past and turn his attention to details of beauty and finish heretofore sadly neglected. The ax of the woodman is followed by the plow of the farmer; the rude trail of the trapper, by the road of the merchant; and the successful introduction of a new line of thought or activity, by its refinement and polish in the smallest details. Volumes have been written and spoken in defense of the "why" and "what is" of manual training; and later the energy has turned to the question of what we shall teach—or the case is opened of models vs. models. Here the end is not yet in sight, nor does it seem as though one were possible; for, on the one side, the champions of the tools clamor of joints, tool sequence, and accuracy; while those who see the boy only murmur of water wheels, boats, and intellectual tinkering. This very divergence of opinion would be a most favorable sign were it not for the fact that they represent, in both cases, small extremes while the general run of schools seem to constitute a very large, solid, and immovable mean.

A few progressive men have ideas and give them out, and we feel that strides are being made; but, in the long run, the work—and I confine myself to elementary bench-work—of the schools of the country is typified, if not actually represented, by the ubiquitous plant-stick, coat-hanger, towel-rack, hammer-handle, etc. And my authority for this statement is a somewhat careful study of the various state and

city exhibits at the great exposition held in St. Louis so recently. There, at least, the manual training teacher could feel at home, for on every side he was greeted by old friends with measurements and even decoration like unto his very own.

Now the reasons for this lethargic and static condition are doubtless many and subtle, and I feel that several of them are outside of the field of the average teacher; so I pass on to a point in our profession upon which little has been said, and maybe it will throw some light upon this first problem.

Our pioneers met and mastered the question whether we ought to teach manual training in our schools; their followers are still busy with the next logical question to be met: What manual training shall we teach in our schools? It is my purpose to propound the third critical question: How shall our teachers teach manual training in our schools?

As it refers to public school work, our subject may be divided into the hand-work stage, up to the seventh grade; the elementary bench-work stage, and the high-school stage; and it is the purpose of this paper to speak of the second entirely. I select this not only because of my experience there, but because I feel that here, as differentiated from the play element on one side and the occupational element on the other, my subject has its broadest and deepest pedagogical and artistic outlook, and that here lies the proper field for the asking of the question as to the opportunities and responsibilities of the manual training teacher.

At its inception, this, our branch of educational effort, was looked upon and approached from the standpoint of technique or technical training, and Old World systems were drawn upon for materials, regardless of their fitness for so wholesale a transplanting, and sometimes for workers as well.

No matter how brilliantly the faculty psychologists argued in its favor as a cure-all for the ever-prevalent diseases of carelessness, disorder, inaccuracy, and the like, the

heart of the movement rested upon the conjunction of boy, tools, and skill; and in "sloyd," that truthful old name, the practical educationalists found their great opportunity.

With this emphasis upon skill and tools, what wonder is it that it came at once to be looked at as a subject apart from the usual curriculum, that its teachers were considered specialists in the extreme, and that those teachers were recruited from the ranks of the mechanical trades? Given benches, tools, and wood on one side, with active boys on the other, who was more fitted to combine the two into a broad and flowing stream of models than the carpenter, pattern-maker, or general shop practice man?

He knows a whole bagful of good tricks that the layman never saw; he can keep tools and shop in excellent order; he can make a model with his trained hands before the boys in true commercial manner; next to the janitor, he will be the handiest man about the place, and—he is cheap. (This latter, of course, entirely by way of parenthesis.) And if one mildly suggests that the man in his relation to the boys be considered, the reply will probably contain three absolute fallacies: first, that the children will respect the manual skill, and therefore the worker; second, that the subject is technical and requires a minimum of personal intercourse between pupil and teacher; and, third, that the subject is so popular a one among the boys that it carries itself along even with the most ordinary assistance. Why I consider these statements incorrect I shall take up later, but right now I wish to disclaim any reflection upon the many excellent teachers in our ranks who have come from the profession. Many of them have been well trained and are skilled teachers, but my point so far has been to show the early filling up of the ranks by many whose sole qualification for the teaching profession has been technical skill in some particular line. This idea still holds in some quarters; and it is to dispute it, and to show some of the real duties or opportunities of the manual training teacher, as opposed to the shop instructor, that this article is written.

At the seventh or eighth-grade age the boy is passing through that stage in his development when childish things are beginning to fall behind and the faint call of manhood begins to make itself heard. He sees a vista of rooms and grades in his district school through which he has passed, and close ahead the four magical high-school years. At the high school the boys wear bands on their hats, yell at football games, escort girls, make fun of the faculty via their own publication, and are altogether quite men. So it behooves the thirteen-year-old boy even to look about him for what the school has to offer as a suggestion toward the ideal of a gentleman and a scholar. The principal is a man who wears a white vest, writes unpleasant notes to one's parents, talks ethics, scolds little boys, is police court in perpetual session, and is altogether awful and depressing. He is doubtless a human being, but rarely within miles of one of his boys. Teacher is fine, and we thoroughly respect and, better yet, love her; but as a manly type we feel that something is lacking. This leaves only the janitor, who smokes a pipe in the basement when the principal goes out; and somehow his appearance is against him.

No, not all hope is gone, for once or twice a week we are separated from the depressingly good influence of the girls and, all by ourselves, turned over to a man and to do a man's work. In dress he is ahead of the janitor, though a little lower than the principal, and his authority and direction are personal like teacher's; but he is a real, live, human man, and he is here for the big boys only, and will treat us as such—not as masculine girls.

I hear you, my critics, label this as fanciful, but have you gotten near enough to your boys' hearts to find out their attitude toward their manual? If not, try it. How are our teachers dealing with this eagerness, none the less true for its frequent expression?

Some time ago I was present at a school where a beginning boy brought his thumb gauge to the teacher and asked for instructions as to its use. His introduction to the tool

began, as nearly as I can quote from memory: "Do you see that, kid?" pointing to the scale on the beam. "Well, the man who put that there was a nickel-plated jackass, and if you ever meet him, you tell him so." The teacher was an excellent mechanic, but hours of work could not make up for the respect he lost in one minute. It explained why discipline was enforced at times in his shop by the application of a style of handwork not listed in the course of study. Again I visited a beautiful shop full of bright, cultured boys to hear the instructor finish a demonstration by saying: "Now you seen how I done it, try it yourselves." All this to illustrate my first point, that if young and highly impressionable boys are to be given by our schools into the authority of men, care should be taken that those men are of such refinement and education that the harm of association may not overbalance the good of the subject. The adherents of the tools will decry all this and claim a teacher's manual ability sufficient; but I claim that no man is fit to stand before small boys, with their keen eyes and sharp judgments, who is not able to do so as a gentleman of refinement and culture at best not inferior to their own.

Given, then, a man whose external personality meets my requirements, I would wish him to add to it a genuine love of his boys and interest in all their concerns. Now, it will be objected that these two considerations (in effect practically one) require a closer contact than the shop affords; but I deny it. I do admit that where every period starts with a twenty to thirty minute demonstration, and the rest of the time is spent by the boys in a mad attempt to catch up with the instruction, little is left for the teacher but his own bench and general police duty. But where the demonstrations are short, thoughtful, and entered into by the boys, there is plenty of opportunity for the teacher to visit, criticise, help, or encourage each individual boy, and so come much closer even than the grade teacher in her fixed location. Maybe you see that the child spoiled a corner, and you make a sympathetic, brief comment and go on; but he saw that you

cared, and some day he will wait after school with a plan of a wind-mill he is going to make, and wants you to offer suggestions upon. That is a victory for you, do you but know it; and pretty soon he waits to help you clear up, walks home with you, and suggests a skating trip when it gets cold. Then you notice his never-failing pleasant look every time he meets your eye, his disposition to tell you of home and the family secrets, and finally his telling you his own boyish troubles—and he is yours. The chances are even, then, that you have done more good to that boy, and the community of which he is a member, than either you or your board will ever know, and at absolutely no expense of said board's time.

It may be objected here that we are paid to teach manual training, and this is out of our line; but to this I object. I am teaching boys, not manual training, and I do not propose to mix up the means and the end. As well say, when the boy cuts himself, that you are a teacher, not a surgeon, and so let him bleed, as to refuse a moral hand to a boy on the score that you are a teacher, not a man. From the strictly practical and technical side, however, we can arrive at the same conclusion, should our senses be dulled to more subtle influences, because this attitude toward the boys pays in models as well as manliness. To illustrate let me tell of a boy in one of my finishing classes who was just completing the towel-rack. It was very poorly done, and I could not seem to lift, or get at him at all. One day I noticed him limp and, after some delay, discovered he had hurt himself on the way to school. I took him from the room, bound up his leg in two places, and fixed him up in considerable comfort—though it cost me some twenty minutes from my class to do it. He was grateful and I saw my chance, and there began a fight to win him. He was the last boy in the grade on his towel-rack, and I spoke my mind. For the first time it was heeded, and he went for a tough old stick of maple, resolved to carve out of it a hammer-handle and his own salvation. When he started he said to me: "I'll try for you this time;" and he

was a man and as good as his word. His model was the best in his class, among the best ever made in the school, and a beautiful piece of work; and as a result of the pride and interest of his parents he now has a fine bench and tools at home. This was not a spurt, for up to this day his work is steadily and thoroughly good, and I feel glad that by the exercise of some methods not suggested in the outline I made a true friend and a good worker.

In addition to this, the teacher should be a man of infinite resource, or the work will sadly suffer in interest. Popular though it may be, manual training will no more carry itself by the simple repetition of definite sets of models than the same sets of questions would serve the grade teachers for years; but it has to be watched, the local needs studied, trifling changes made, and the dry bones covered by real living—i.e., growing—tissues. From experience in a shop of over five hundred boys a week I find the average of interest in work fluctuates as follows: In the start the pressure is way up, and steam is always blowing off, and more often various forms of safety-valves come in handy; at the middle of the first year the engine is going smoothly and time is being made; with the start of the second year (eighth grade) the pressure begins to drop now and then; and at the middle of that year the wise man will keep the stoker busy and read up on the patent fuel. The reason is, I believe, that at the beginning the work is so new and pleasant that the model excites no discrimination or criticism; while at the close of the course skill and thought give a basis for judgment, and we are dealing with boys of considerable taste and critical ability. If the course, at this point, consists of small, fussy, detail work, let the teacher introduce a large, well-designed, and thoroughly practical and desirable model, and see the result. The writer has just made such an experiment with results far beyond his wildest expectations, and has seen his young men working with the keen interest of the most enthusiastic beginner.

Finally, my ideal manual training teacher must be in it

as his life-work, study it and the entire school work of which it is simply a part, and follow it alone. I thoroughly believe that one great stumbling-block of our profession is the men in its midst who are teaching for the time being only, using the school as a stepping-stone to other things. They may be men of ambition who, as one man told me, leave the front door at 3 P. M. when the boys leave the back, and so find time for law, insurance, real estate, cabinet work, music, and the like; but they are not teachers, and never can be. To such men this article, of course, has no message or interest, for their work is but routine drudgery to themselves and their hapless charges. But it is well to note them for their influence in lowering the salaries and the general intellectual and pedagogical standing of our hard and conscientious workers.

My omission of technical skill as a requirement is simply the admission of it as an obvious fact, and requiring no championship of mine.

In conclusion, my appeal is to the earnest members of my profession to demand higher intellectual and cultural standing of its members; to encourage the student-worker to enter the field; and so to constitute the rank and file of our profession that the manual training teacher may demand and hold the educational position to which the importance, scope, and possibilities of this subject entitle him.